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ABSTRACT

Mainstreaming the handicapped child requires much more than mere placement in a regular classroom. Careful thought and preparation must be devoted to the affective, as well as cognitive, aspects of classroom experience. This paper describes the mainstreaming program at the North Rowan Primary School in Rowan County, North Carolina. Through team teaching, use of a special resource team, formation of "family" groups of handicapped and "normal" students, and extensive inservice training, the staff has acquired many skills and techniques to strengthen the teaching of basic skills, to assist children in assuming responsibility, and to develop realistic attitudes toward self and others. Mainstreaming and the program devised to implement it have been of benefit to all pupils. (Author)

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OBSERVATIONS OF A PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AFTER FOUR YEARS OF EXPERIENCE WITH MAINSTREAMING

GANELDA H. SOWERS

The fundamental right of all children to have access to an education is an American tradition. While paying lip service to this ideal, school administrators were denying some children admission to public school because of inadequate physical facilities, teaching personnel, and resources. An act of Congress has mandated that this is no longer to be considered just a tradition but a legal right. Today one of the most pressing concerns of administrators is delivery of services to these pupils.

In the past "different" children were pulled out of the regular classroom for "normal" children and placed into "special" classrooms. Regardless of the variance or exceptionality, these children knew they were being isolated. Some of these isolated children became alienated from learning and from the other children.

This was the situation of the North Rowan Primary School prior to 1973 when the decision was made to place pupils with special needs into the mainstream of the school.

The North Rowan Primary School is a member of the Rowan County School System. The central school offices are located in East Spencer, N. C. The school is situated in the northern end of the county at Spencer, N. C. Two formerly all-white schools and one all-black school were combined to form a primary school in 1968. This was a final step in the elimination of a dual school system. Today there are approximately 900 children attending grades K-4. There is a ratio of 61% white and 39% black. The staff consists of 42 full-time teachers, 16 aides (12 of whom are certified teachers), 2

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secretaries, and one part-time person in guidance and physical education.

The population of the school area is relatively stable. It is comprised of families which have at least one parent working. However, some families participate in the food stamp program and receive assistance for dependent children. Approximately forty percent of the pupils qualify for the free breakfast and lunch program.

The district as a whole includes children coming from older established residences, new residential developments, mobile home parks, and federally-funded housing projects. The children have markedly different backgrounds and environments, ranging from very low economic to upper middle class levels. Many come from homes which have not been able to provide experiences and opportunities educators believe essential for well-balanced adjustment and high achievement in school.

The occupational status of the parents includes a majority employed in textile manufacturing. The last community survey showed

.. 37% engaged in semi-skilled jobs

.. 20% engaged in jobs requiring skills

.. 11% engaged in unskilled occupations

.. 5% engaged in professional occupations

.. 6% engaged in clerical positions

.. 6% engaged in service occupations

.. 10% engaged in managerial positions

.. 5% engaged in farming, the military or were unemployed

The educational status of the parents, according to the survey, was

.. 8% with formal education in the elementary school only

..33% with partial but incomplete high school education

..47% have completed high school

.. 3% have some formal education beyond high school other than college

.. 4% have some college education but without a degree

.. 4% have a bacculaureate degree

.. 1% have advanced degrees

Some influences affecting the decision to mainstream the pupils were

1. the construction of a new school building with open spaces which would offer opportunities for flexibility not previously available
2. the individual needs of children in relationship to the multi-faceted community could be served more adequately
3. the belief that an atmosphere of freedom from fear of failure, freedom from pressures and strains, freedom to explore the world of knowledge, and freedom to learn at their own rate and in their own style could be provided
4. an emphasis was to be placed upon the development of responsibility for self and consideration of others
5. the provision of services to pupils could be delivered without the necessity of labeling children
6. a review of the literature indicated that exceptional children needed peer relationships that reflected society

Many problems must be solved if such a program is to be implemented. Mainstreaming requires

. new perspectives and new skills for the staff

. increased awareness and sensitivity on the part of each individual

. supportive resources for the classroom teacher

. in-service for teachers with emphasis on acquiring diagnostic and observational skills

. acceptance by the faculty

. understanding by resource teachers of their role

. acceptance of children with special needs by other pupils

. variety of instructional materials

. efficient methods in diagnosing and prescribing for individual pupils

A series of in-service workshops were designed for teachers, aides, and resource team members. These training sessions placed emphasis on the affective as well as the cognitive aspects of the curriculum. It was determined that teachers needed assistance in:

- understanding of handicapped pupils
- diagnostic and prescriptive teaching in mainstreamed classrooms
- goal setting with pupils
- providing for individual differences in pupil learning modalities and styles
- dealing with specific learning disabilities
- selecting curriculum materials
- "family grouping" procedures in the classroom
- recognition of emotional blocks to learning
- administering and interpreting reading and mathematics inventories from a developmental perspective

The following workshops were conducted by psychologists and educators from the fields of special education and educational psychology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill:

- The Affective Curriculum - an Overview
- Bridging the Cognitive and Affective Domains in the Classroom
- Emotional Blocks to Learning
- Selecting and Using Affective Curriculum Materials
- Emotional Problems Associated with Specific Learning Disabilities
- A Humanistic Approach to Reading Instruction
- Emotional Implications of Speech and Language Problems
- Analyzing Pupil-Teacher Interaction
- Micro-Teaching: Monitoring Your Own Performance in the Classroom
- Helping Pupils Learn the Skills of Self-Management
- Developing an Affective Curriculum: Putting It All Together

Other workshops were held during the next two years which included

. the Glasser Technique

. production of materials

. ways to study pupils through observation

. techniques for teaching slower learners

. child development

. evaluating pupils

Mainstreaming the child requires more than merely placement in a regular classroom. Consideration must be given to the affect of this change on the child. Careful and thoughtful preparation as to the assignment needs to be given. The administrator must analyze the faculty in terms of

. degree of acceptance of concept by teacher

. strengths of classroom teacher

. pupil population of classroom

. recommendations of resource team

. teaching styles

. personality of teacher and child

To lessen the impact on the child, "family grouping" has been organized within the suites (classrooms) of the school. This type of grouping is directly related in concept to the basic American family, wherein members vary in ages, abilities, interests, and personalities. Family groups are made up of six to eight children. The family group encourages each member, gives and/or receives support, works to accept individual members, cooperates to accomplish assigned tasks, and assumes some responsibility. Each family has a leader, either appointed by the teacher or elected by the group. The teacher facilitates support, acceptance, and cooperation among family members and is an active member of the family. Through group or class meetings, children are assisted in developing acceptance of others, in developing self-discipline, in assuming responsibility for behavior, and in developing an awareness of the consequences of behavior.

New perspectives must be acquired by members of the resource team. The role of the teacher of exceptional children shifts from full-time instructor to include responsibilities of a diagnostic and consultative nature. At the same time, the regular classroom teacher faces a new set of demands on time, skill, and patience with the presence of exceptional pupils. Both teachers need to learn to work productively and efficiently together.

The primary role of the resource team may be described as one of resource management. This, in turn, provides a principal support for the teacher teams who are responsible for situational management. The resource teacher plays a key role in program planning, procurement of materials and supplies, communication between the teacher teams, and liason with the home and school.

The resource team at North Rowan Primary School is comprised of:

- The speech correctionist - who identifies and provides therapy for children who have speech and/or hearing handicaps. This includes problems in articulation, voice, rhythm and language.
- The teacher of the educable mentally retarded children who helps provide successful instructional experiences. Attention is given to the development of the socialization skills of the pupils.
- The teachers of children who have emotional and/or learning disabilities. Emphasis is placed on individual and small group instruction.
- The public health nurse - who helps identify the health needs of the pupils. Home visits are made and conferences are held with parents. Often referrals are made for medical services.
- The media specialist - who recommends instructional materials that will enhance the curriculum, taking into consideration the varied ages, interests, abilities, and personalities of the learners. The media program stimulates creativity and meets the developmental needs of the pupils

For most of the day, special learners are in the regular classroom. However, at times, a member of the resource team works with the learner in tutorial sessions.

Often the resource team meets with the teacher-teams to exchange observations as to the growth or change that has occured and to plan for future program developments.

Four years of operating under this model has created a new and exciting relationship between "special" education teachers and classroom teachers. They are very supportive of each other. A new concept of team teaching has emerged. Programs begun are carried through by the combined team. The resource team is consulted frequently about ways of working with children who have problems but are not identified as participants in mainstreaming.

Teachers have developed a commitment to work with children of varying abilities. Deep concern is expressed when one of these "special" pupils transfers to a situation where placement is in a self-contained special education classroom. Concentrated efforts are made by teachers to provide a wide variety of matierials at many grade levels so that all pupils experience success.

The staff is better trained in how to help pupils develop positive attitudes toward learning and how to plan activities to remediate learning problems. All children have benefitted from this training. Reading and mathematical inventories have been prepared. Emphasis is placed on accomplishments of skills which are recorded on an inventory form for each pupil. Skill groups are formed and basics are taught for mastery.

Earlier identification of pupils with special needs is evident. The staff has acquired skills which aid in diagnosing learning problems. A systematic plan has been developed for referring pupils for testing and for acquiring feedback on test results. Teachers have conferences with the psychologists in order to receive suggestions for working with individual pupils.

There has been notable progress in the behavior and the learning of the educable mentally retarded pupils. They have become well-adjusted to the mainstream of school programs. Family grouping and interaction with others has contributed to social development. In all school situations attention is given to effective group processes, cooperation, understanding of self and others, so that the desire and ability to behave appropriately as the place and occasion demands may be developed. Election as classroom good citizen of the week recognizes pupils showing progress in this area.

One of the more significant aspects of mainstreaming is the availability of good models for the pupils. Often in the self-contained class the bully becomes the "super star" of the group. Other children imititated this behavior to be rewarded by the attention received from the teacher and peers. Pupils with special needs who are in regular classrooms now have a deeper awareness of behaviors that are acceptable and have established friendships with peers whom they wish to imitate.

The delivery of resources has been improved. Now

- the services of two well-trained school psychologists are available
- the model developed at this school has become an example for mainstreaming in other schools within the system
- the accessibility of the resource team for parent conferences has resulted in greater understanding and acceptance of the program and the children
- a strong link has been established between the school and various community agencies and resources which might be able to provide services of one form or another for children and/or their families
- a greater number of children have access to a wider variety of instructional materials

There is an acceptance by other pupils of the children with special needs. It is not unusual for other children to request assistance from the EMR teacher working in the classroom with EMR pupils. It is considered a real treat to be invited by an EMR pupil to accompany him to the resource room on occasion. No labeling of pupils is apparent. The fact that "your book is different from mine" or "you are on another page" does not disturb pupils since a multi-textbook adoption is practiced in the areas of language arts, health, mathematics, and social studies.

The curriculum has been improved and revised to include affective goals. Teachers, as a result of in-service training, now provide experiences to strengthen self-concept through individualizing subject matter, developing the interest of children, and creating situations where choices can be made. We are trying to provide learning experiences to help pupils form habits and attitudes that lead to responsibile adulthood.

Individualization has been more fully implemented. Goals have been set for other pupils as well as individual educational plans for the EMR pupils. A wide variety of materials are constructed for use in the classroom. Individualization gives each child the attention and training he needs at the level on which he is working.

Teachers are more flexible, using many teaching styles, strategies, and methods based upon the needs of the pupils and in keeping with the philosophy of the school.

In conclusion, this approach to mainstreaming has been of benefit to all pupils. A better trained staff has acquired many skills and techniques to strengthen the teaching of basic skills, to assist children in assuming responsibilities for behavior and completion of tasks, and to develop realistic attitudes toward self and others.

The following statement is taken from the philosophy of the North Rowan Primary School: "We believe that the major educational outcome should be to

set free the mind of each child who enters the classroom so that he may understand as well as to know." Mainstreaming has been one means of implementing this belief.